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CITIZEN-SOLDIERS IN A 21ST CENTURY ARMY AT WAR

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“Reserves and guardsmen were called up three or four months before they were needed, to find out they were not needed, and many were given only five days’ notice, rather than the goal of 30 days, which really isn’t fair to them... And it’s not fair to their families or their employers. And that’s not right.

We need to fix it, and we’re in the process of getting it fixed.”

--Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

In the first decade of the 19th Century, Prussian General Karl Von Clausewitz set out to determine why nations with the most professional armies of his day lost war after war to the seemingly less-professional armies of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. In his now famous manuscript, *On War*, Clausewitz identified as essential to the nature of war the interplay of three key elements: the Government, the General and the army, and the people. From the government derived the fundamental rationale, from the general and the army the necessary skill and courage, and from the people the passions that enabled the creation and sustained exertion of tremendous national power.¹ Successful conduct of war therefore requires both the preparation and the thoughtful orchestration of all three elements to draw forth and appropriately direct the maximum power of the nation. A little over a century and a half later, an American general, Army Chief of Staff Creighton W. Abrams, concluded that a substantial reason for the defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War was the US Government’s failure properly to engage the passion of its people via the employment of its “well-regulated militia” – which the Nation’s founding fathers actually had cited as “necessary to the security of a free state” a decade before Clausewitz wrote.² Accordingly, General Abrams supported policies and initiated a restructuring of the “Total Army”³ so as to attempt to ensure the involvement of America’s part-time citizen-soldiers in any future conflicts, believing this would ensure the connection to



¹ Von Clausewitz, Karl. *On War*, Book One, Chapter One, Section 28.

² Second Amendment, US Constitution.

³ Although the term is no longer in vogue, General Abrams’ “Total Army” consists of the full-time active component forces and the part-time U.S. Army Reserve and U.S. Army National Guard forces.

⁴ For a further discussion of the “Abrams Doctrine” see the section entitled “Looking Back” in Bruce Jacobs’ March 2003 article entitled “Lessons Lost” at <http://www.ngaus.org/ngmagazine/lessonslost303.asp>

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the populace at large.⁴ Today, three decades later, with the Nation engaged again in war abroad and also threatened at home, those policies and structures are being tested, and in some instances questioned.

Debates on the proper role, size, structure, and use of part-time citizen-soldiers in 21st Century warfare will lead to decisions that will impact all components of the Army – and may ultimately affect the ability of the Nation to successfully fight and win its current and future wars. To assist in exploring the related issues, the Army War College’s Center for Strategic Leadership, as part of its Future Land Warfare program, hosted a Collins Center Senior Seminar, 7-8 August 2003. The key participants were seven retired general officers representing service in the Active Army, the Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard. These participants were unanimous on one point: nothing seen or foreseeable thus far in the 21st Century obviates the beliefs of either General Clausewitz or General Abrams. Therefore, retaining an inseparable link between the people, the Government, and the Army should -- nay *must* -- remain a primary goal of U.S. policy. The exact nature and mechanism for that link is less clear. Nevertheless, to ensure the Nation is truly committed to generating the necessary sustained power to achieve victory prior to pursuing its objectives through the application of violence the process for “going to war” should be made if anything more difficult, not easier. Military intervention “should not be just another federal ‘government program’.” Therefore, continued reliance on an Army – and a joint military – that demands the involvement of both its active and its reserve components to generate its striking and sustaining power is a positive good and not a detriment.

On other issues the dialogue also was frank and open. While there was not always consensus, the selected insights below represent the considered wisdom of not only decades of professional military service but also individual deep reflection on the implications of an evolving global geo-political landscape and transforming military institutions and threats.

INSIGHTS

1. It is unnecessary, and would not be useful, to designate officially homeland security as the primary mission of the National Guard. Unnecessary because HLS missions are already viewed as the top priority for the Guard’s principal commanders – the State Governors. Not useful because, for all three Army components, development of combat power⁵ is and should remain “job one.” Once developed, that combat power can be tailored to fit and tasked to accomplish required both overseas and/or HLS missions, thereby providing the nation with flexibility to meet unforeseen contingencies.
2. The currently popular perception among some defense analysts that land forces are no longer a dominant force on the battlefield is incorrect. All Army senior leaders must articulate more effectively the requirements for land combat power in quantity as well as quality. The Nation *must* retain significant combat capability in its reserve components as reinforcing and risk-reduction elements with only a 10-division active force. The possibility of reorganizing the combat maneuver units of the National Guard as “lighter” rather than “heavy” organizations is, however, worthy of study. Infantry requirements are increasing rather than decreasing in 21st Century conflicts. Reorganized “lighter” NG combat forces also might assist in addressing three recurrent and persistent issues: (a) strategic lift shortfalls, (b) modernization dollar shortfalls, and (c) effectiveness *as cohesive units* in either overseas and HLS situations.

⁵ Combat power may be best defined as the realizable capability of a fighting force at any instant of time to achieve results in furtherance of a particular mission. Combat power is a function of quality as well as quantity, of not only physical elements (weapons, mobility systems, fortifications, logistics, etc.) but also intangible elements (knowledge, skill, and leadership of commanders and other personnel, morale and élan, etc.). Thus, two units of apparently identical size and physical composition actually may generate significantly different combat power.

⁶ “Round out” refers to filling an “empty” space within an organization, providing a division’s third maneuver brigade for example. “Round up” adds an additional element to the organization, providing a division with a fourth maneuver brigade for example.

3. The Army has experimented with a variety of concepts to have RC elements “round out” or “round up”⁶ active component forces in the past. The seminar participants felt the Army should seriously consider re-instituting such programs for divisions, brigades, battalions, and perhaps even smaller organizations, today. RO/RU perhaps could provide a structured means to assist in the management of currently unallocated RC maneuver brigades to help meet war-fighting and HLS requirements. Issues of equipment interoperability and training availability/interaction would have to be addressed, but RO/RU might provide more rapid accessibility to the combat power in the RC across a broad range of contingencies and overseas force rotation options. At the least, every active component brigade could and should take a NG armor or mechanized element – at least a company, perhaps a full battalion – with it to a Combat Training Center rotation. RO/RU is deserving of serious consideration not only for combat, but also for combat support and combat service support, units.
4. Concerns regarding availability and access to certain High-Demand/Low-Density (HD/LD) organizations can and should be addressed without wholesale reorganization of the entire Army. Creating new HD/LD units in the AC at the expense of combat unit structure should not be done without significant review, for a number of reasons, principally related to extent OPTEMPO and the time to recruit and train cohesive units. Instead, segregate HD/LD problems from other issues, and task the National Guard and Army Reserve to work together to identify the best possible fixes within the reserve components. Working together, ARNG and USAR senior leaders should be able to identify and implement any necessary structure and process solutions to provide both adequate numbers and timely access to the required capabilities.
5. The retention ramifications of the current operational tempo are not yet knowable, for either the AC or the RC. Deployments bring both costs and benefits to the soldiers involved, and thus far the available data is insufficient to validly predict a trend, although some anecdotal information suggests that overseas deployments are viewed more positively than HLS ones. Nonetheless, there certainly exists the potential for significant mid-level management (officer and NCO) shortages to develop in the years ahead if junior leaders and soldiers choose to leave the services in larger numbers. Possible remedies include granting the NG and USAR authority to recruit replacements for a unit while that unit is still deployed so as to permit its rapid reconstitution⁷, and additional institutional personnel programs and policies to address mid-level leader education, management, satisfaction, and retention.
6. There was a concern by all participants that the Army is “eating its seed corn” with ongoing institutional army reductions. The true advantages of the U.S. military over its opponents are less a function of its weapons’ or even its command and control technologies than of the superiority of its soldier and leader training, education, and professional development systems. Personnel and budget reductions in the “TDA” Army threaten to reduce or even eliminate those advantages. This is both an individual (school quotas, etc.) and collective (NTC rotations, exercises, etc.) issue, and may impact the RC disproportionately due to scheduling and competition for spaces. While current policies *may* create additional near term combat capability, the Army of 2015 *will* prove to be significantly less capable than the Army today if this trend is not halted, or better yet reversed.



⁷ Such a policy would permit the RC recruits to complete required IET training while the unit was deployed, thereby speeding their integration as productive members of the unit upon its return.

CONCLUSION

The right mix of active and reserve, combat and combat support and combat service support, forces for a nation focused principally on major combat operations overseas may not be the best for a military faced with the need to defend at home while conducting short notice operations abroad. Those policies and procedures for efficiently leading and managing a military force in times of relative peace may not be sufficiently effective in a time of war. The U.S. military now *is* a military at war, serving a nation at war, at home and abroad. Just as no plan survives intact contact with the enemy, no victorious military ends a war without having changed during the course of that war. But changes should not be impetuous; remember that the extent Active Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard force and processes thus far generally have served the Nation very well. Decisions on whether and what to change need to be considered thoughtfully and deliberately, and be tempered by sustained experience, by an understanding of the underpinnings of existing military cultures and traditions, and by a recognition that there is a proper and prominent place for professional military judgment when selecting between alternatives. Those most qualified to see when and where there is a true need for -- and to direct -- changes in the composition and utilization of the Army to serve the nation at war should be its Active Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard senior leaders in combination. There must be no doubt that the capabilities and contributions of all three components will continue to prove essential to achieving victory in any modern war.

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